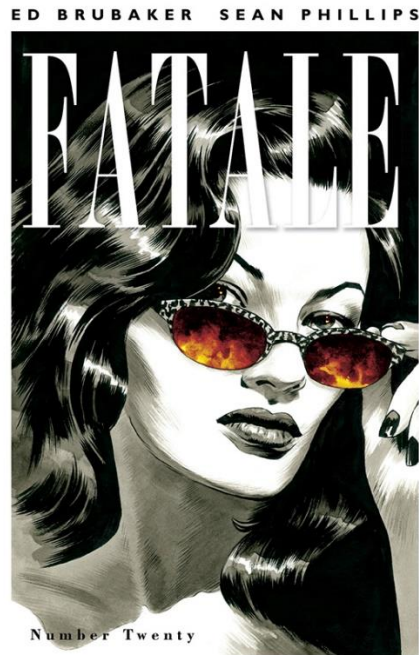




Fatale by Ed Brubaker & Sean Phillips

[Crime]



Noir with a Lovecraftian twist and the best covers EVER!

We begin in a graveyard, present day, with Nicolas Lash burying his godfather, one Dominic H. Raines, a detective novelist who, however successful, died alone, bitter and broken. He was also an avowed atheist, so quite what those sigils are doing on his gravestone, Nicolas has no idea. But then Jo, the most beautiful woman Nicolas has ever beheld, appears as if out of nowhere:

“My grandmother had them on her grave too... She and Mr Raines were in love once. I think that symbol was something private between them... Some piece of the past they couldn't let go of.”

And Nicolas is irretrievably smitten.





Later that night he goes through his godfather's effects and discovers an unpublished manuscript dated all the way back to 1957 called 'The Losing Side of Eternity'. At which point all hell breaks loose before we flash back to San Francisco, 1956, when Dominic Raines was a happily married man with a kid on the way. He's not yet a writer, but a reporter determined to expose police corruption and in particular one Walt Booker who happens to be dating... oh, hello! She looks exactly like Jo!

Then there are tentacles and some heads fall off.

Ah, *la femme fatale*: beautiful, seductive and disastrous for all who stray near. But Brubaker and Phillips have carved something far more interesting in Josephine who's cursed by her persuasive powers which she cannot shut off, just like you can't control your own pheromones, while she sees all those around her paying the price. One of FATALE's complexities lies in its multiple third-person perspectives: Josephine's, obviously, but also those of the men who find themselves stricken by the raven-haired beauty who appears to weather the ravages of time infinitely better than those who fixate. Each for their own reason feels they have no option but to forge forward in their different directions; each believes they are running out of time. All of them seem linked by and trapped in a web woven wider and wider across time, spanning an entire century... or perhaps even longer.

This self-awareness is key to this series' success: its protagonists retain just enough self-knowledge to realise that their self-guidance is fucked whilst being unable to alter course.

Also smart is Phillips's art, perfectly accessible to those new to comics on account of its three clear tiers, the lettering arranged at the top so that one's eyes move swiftly from left to right rather than straying perilously down a row too early. He's also one of the best character actors in the business.

Cigarette smoke is rendered with a very dry brush, while much of the violence is framed in expressionistically rendered and instinctively positioned darkness. I love the way Sean Phillips draws gunshots in jagged flashes of fire: you wait until you read his KILL OR BE KILLED!





Here all his male faces all have that haunted, lived-in look: battered by the years and by what their lives have thrown at them. I've long said that I never trust anyone drawn by Sean Phillips. Faces are constantly cast in shadow, masking their owners' motives and making you fear the very worst – either *of* them or *for* them. I only realised this towards the end, but the one face *not* semi-shrouded throughout is Josephine's. It makes her seem slightly ethereal – not quite of the world around her.

Also Recommended by Brubaker & Phillips:

PULP, KILL OR BE KILLED, THE FADE OUT, RECKLESS and CRIMINAL which encompasses MY HEROES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN JUNKIES etc: it's all noir within which Brubaker creates such compelling internal monologues that you'll want to spend maximum time inside their doomed heads.

